

Vol. 34, No. 4**February 2019****Asian Pacific American conservative Christians mediating in culture war?**

Asian Pacific American conservative Christians are playing an important mediating role between liberal and conservative Americans given that they hold views found in both camps and are increasingly engaging in political and civic life, write Joseph Yi and Joe Phillips in the social science magazine *Society* (online in January). The way in which conservative Asian Pacific Americans (APAs) interact with “both highly-educated progressives and less-educated conservatives...[gives] them a ‘foot in each camp’ when the political system is experiencing unusual polarization.” The authors cite research showing that conservative Christian APAs tend to hold pro-life and anti-gay marriage positions while supporting immigrant rights and anti-nativist positions. They point to the 2018 midterm elections, where Young Kim, a Korean American Republican candidate, ran a campaign where she distanced herself from some of President Trump’s rhetoric while agreeing on other positions, opposing California’s “sanctuary” policies, for example, but criticizing the federal government’s separation of migrant families at the border. She embraced the traditional Republican position on lowering regulations on businesses and described herself as pro-life on abortion and as supporting traditional marriage. Other APA conservative Christian political leaders who often eschew Trump’s nationalist rhetoric are Philadelphia City Councilman David H. Oh and Orange County (CA) Supervisor Michelle Park Steel.

APA evangelicals are also increasingly influential in such Christian organizations as InterVarsity, making up more than one-third of its national membership, including its president Tom Lin and director of internal relations Greg Jao. Both have partnered with the Aspen Institute to promote dialogue among persons of different and no faiths. Yi and Phillips place APA evangelicals close to the precincts of New York’s Redeemer Presbyterian Church (which is over 40 percent Asian) and its pastor Tim Keller because of the influential megachurch’s blend of multi-ethnic outreach, conservative theology, and social justice concerns for the poor. In their greater political and civic involvement, conservative Christian APAs have also courted controversy. The most prominent example of this is University of California-Berkeley student senator Isabella Chow, who last fall publicly abstained from voting for student resolutions opposing the Trump administration’s Title

IX changes regarding gender, saying she could not compromise her values and responsibility to the Christian community she represented. At the same time, she condemned discrimination against the LGBTQ community. Over 300 protestors demanded Chow's resignation, the force of which reaction was probably "because hers was the only conservative Christian voice in the Berkeley student senate and the first in recent memory," Li and Phillips write.

(*Society*, <https://link.springer.com/journal/12115>)



New Atheism finds new targets on the left

While the New Atheist movement, represented by such authors and spokesmen as Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, has lost much of its public prominence, its contentious form of atheism is now more often directed at academic liberalism as well as Islam. In the magazine *The Point* (number 8), Jacob Hamburger writes that 2014 was the year a number of New Atheism's celebrities began making their comeback, such as Harris, who targeted liberals as being too soft on Islam and what he saw as its intolerance for such principles as women's equality and freedom of speech. "The following year saw a wave of terrorism in Europe, as well as the launch of Donald Trump's presidential campaign and the return of media scandals over 'political correctness' on American college campuses. New Atheist celebrities formed a vocal contingent of an emerging collective which has sought to link these disparate developments into a common narrative" charging that a new irrationalism has made many mainstream liberals incapable of defending or even recognizing their core principles. Such developments "produced a schism among prominent atheists," with one side, represented by media figures such as *The Young Turks'* Cenk Uygur and Kyle Kulinski,

linking atheism to progressive politics, and the other side, including prominent New Atheist celebrities, feeling “that the emphasis on feminism, diversity and anti-imperialism distracted from the fight against religious extremism.”

Hamburger adds that during this same time, “some fans of New Atheism began to flirt with aspects of the growing online far right, posting in forums such as r/atheism on Reddit.” Although many atheists are critical of the alt-right and its association with white nationalism, these posts shared in a common discourse lampooning liberal sensitivity and “political correctness.” “In 2017, the repentant liberal atheist Phil Torres [even] went so far as to conclude that New Atheism had undergone a ‘merger’ with the alt-right.” But Hamburger adds that any such merger is far from clear, as most New Atheist leaders continued to insist they were good liberals and agreed that Trump was damaging the Republican Party. Meanwhile, campus controversies—from disinvited speakers at Berkeley to a “cultural appropriation” scandal at Oberlin to the confrontation at Yale over Halloween costumes—served as a sign to many New Atheists that liberalism too was in decline.

Since Trump’s victory, “the issue of political correctness has only become more pressing for many prominent New Atheists. Increasingly central to their arguments today is the idea that American liberalism has in fact become illiberal, obsessed with the primacy of group identities over the individual.... As many of those associated with New Atheism have taken up the fight against political correctness—including Harris, [Bill] Maher, [Michael] Shermer...and Steven Pinker—they have gravitated towards a larger group that includes not only self-described liberals, but also conservatives like the former *Breitbart* editor Ben Shapiro and the celebrity psychologist Jordan Peterson,” Hamburger notes. What unites these apparently dissimilar figures is the belief that the contemporary left has abandoned both rational thinking and liberal values, and that this left must be defeated by appealing to a more authentic liberalism.

(*The Point*, <https://thepointmag.com/2019/politics/what-was-new-atheism>)



Religious left finds hope at midterm of Trump era

There are signals of a new dynamism of the religious left in the U.S. for similar—if opposite—reasons to those that drove the Moral Majority on the right 40 years ago, writes Tom Gjelten in *NPR News* (Jan. 24). While they are still primarily “[keeping] their focus on protest rallies and social media campaigns” and remain very far from the level of organization and influence displayed by groups on the religious right, religious voters on the left resent the “provocations of President Trump” as an assault on beliefs and values that they hold dear and see as strongly related to their Christian faith—support for immigrant rights, universal health care, LGBTQ rights and racial justice.

Among those attempting to mobilize the religious left, Gjelten mentions Faith in Public Life, a network founded in 2005 by Rev. Jennifer Butler (Presbyterian) and claiming to gather 50,000 “clergy and faith leaders united in the prophetic pursuit of justice and the common good,” as well as the “Moral Monday” movement, and Poor People’s campaign launched by Rev. William Barber, an African-American preacher from North Carolina. Barber cooperates with Butler and addressed the Democrats at their last national convention. Gjelten adds that secular activists on the left are also becoming open to the energy that a religious left might bring to their causes. However, the article also identifies hurdles for the religious left in its quest for impact. It still lacks the sophistication and experience of the religious right. It has a smaller base than the right, with nearly half of liberals under 30 having no religious affiliation. It has more difficulty defining a clear



identity, with agendas quite similar to those of secular organizations of the left. On the other hand, its strength may lie in its ability for bridge-building in an increasingly diverse, multifaith American environment.

Changes in temple ceremony leading to changed Mormon attitudes toward gender roles?

Changes to one of the special ceremonies held at the temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) that extensively revised and eliminated references to traditional gender roles have been favorably received by church members and may result in more egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles among them, writes Benjamin Knoll in the blog *Religion in Public* (January 10). The revisions were made to the endowment ceremony held in Mormon temples, which liturgically reenacts the creation of the world and humanity, the Garden of Eden, and God's establishment of a covenant relationship with Adam and Eve. The ceremony, which is meant to represent God's covenant relationship with humanity that enables them to return to God's presence in the afterlife, was revised to elevate the role of Eve to be equal to that of Adam. The responses to these changes among members are reported to be favorable, especially among LDS feminists. Knoll predicts that the revised endowment ceremony is likely to shape Mormon gender attitudes, especially among girls who are more sensitive than boys to the depiction of female role models.

Knoll tests this hypothesis by analyzing the 2016 Next Mormons Survey he conducted with Jana Riess, finding that participation in the endowment ceremony affected attitudes toward gender roles in marriage and church leadership. For instance, 75 percent of those respondents who participated in the endowment ceremony believed that a male-only priesthood was God's will compared to only 58 percent of those who had not participated; and 69 percent of those participating in the ceremony preferred traditional gender marriage arrangements compared to only 49 percent of those who had not participated. After controlling for church attendance and other demographic factors, participating in the endowment ceremony was still found to increase the difference in preferences regarding gender roles in marriage by 20 percent. Knoll reasons that since the previous endowment ceremony may have raised the level of support for traditional gender roles, this liturgical revision will likely "lead to a gradual shift toward much more egalitarian gender norms among Latter-day Saints."

(*Religion in Public*, <https://religioninpublic.blog/2019/01/10/recent-latter-day-saint-temple-changes-may-revolutionize-mormon-gender-norms/>)



United Nations’ secular culture stymieing interfaith relations?

Interfaith dialogue at the international level is well-meaning, but it is unclear if it advances its stated goals of reducing tensions and conflicts, writes Jeffrey Haynes (London Metropolitan University) in an issue of *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* (Fall 2018) devoted to interfaith on the world stage. Indeed, as the editors of the issue remark, while the supposed potential of the interfaith movement has attracted attention at the highest diplomatic levels after 9/11, the effectiveness of interfaith initiatives remains debated. The plethora of “scattered, uncoordinated” interfaith initiatives in recent years does not make it easier to assess if they make a practical difference in building peace, a purpose shared by most of them. Haynes’s own case study examines the involvement in interfaith dialogue of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), which was created in 2005 and formally established in 2006 under the direct leadership of the UN Secretary-General, with a focus on three faith-based entities with which the UNAOC regularly cooperates: the Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN (CRNGO), Religions for Peace (RfP), and the United Religions Initiative (URI). The vision of the UNAOC was to involve civil society, including faith-based NGOs, in efforts to prevent a “clash of civilizations,” obviously with a focus on relations between the West and the Muslim world.

But the UNAOC has shown reluctance to engage fully with interfaith dialogue, something that Haynes attributes to the UN's secular culture, with its preponderance of state-based stakeholders and unwillingness to grant religious actors an increased institutional role. The UN and its institutions prefer to work with secular actors. Moreover, diplomats interviewed by Haynes expressed some skepticism about the benefits of interfaith dialogue and pointed to its lack of relevance in not approaching issues crucial to some conflicts (e.g., by focusing on Muslim-Christian relations but not Sunni-Shia intrafaith dialogue). With the UN's typical focus on "religious leaders" as defined by their official positions, there is little evidence that the UNAOC "has achieved much in relation to civil society," including faith-based organizations. Still, Haynes sees some potential for the UNAOC to reach some local communities in its cooperation with community-focused initiatives such as the URI. He acknowledges that faith-based actors are not ignored, that UNAOC representatives attend their main events and that these actors get involved in some of the conversations, but notes that "many would claim that they are not taken seriously enough in thinking through solutions" for addressing social and political issues, including violent extremism, notwithstanding the stated intent to involve them. Despite paying lip-service to faith, "the UN remains *the* global bastion of secular power," according to Haynes's assessment.

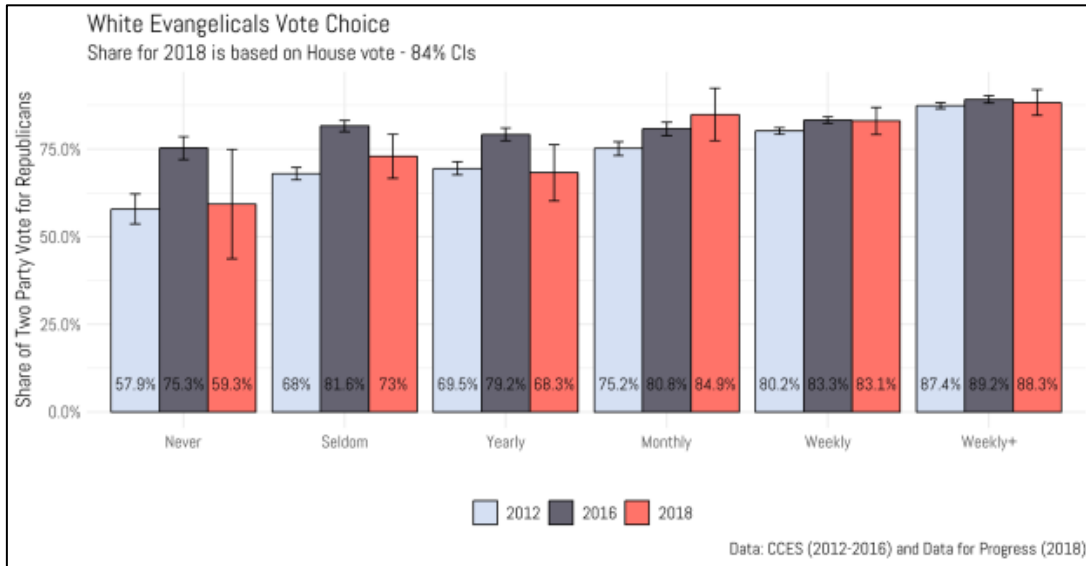
(The Review of Faith & International Affairs, P.O. Box 12205, Arlington, VA 22219-2205 – www.tandfonline/rfia)



CURRENT RESEARCH

● **New data on white evangelical voting patterns and views during the 2018 midterm elections show about the same level of support for the presidency of Donald Trump as there was for candidate Trump in the 2016 presidential race.** The blog *Religion in Public* (January 28) analyzed raw numbers recently released from a survey conducted by Data for Progress, the first publicly available dataset from the most recent election cycle. While white evangelicals showed no change in their tendency to vote Republican in 2018, the new data indicated that they actually identified themselves more strongly as Republicans than they did in 2016, particularly those who reported attending church more than once a week. And while other racial and religious groups may have moderated or nuanced their views since the contentious 2016 race, evangelical support for Trump has changed little since then. Among white born-again Protestants attending church more than weekly, 85 percent approved of Trump’s job performance, with the percentage only dropping to 77 percent among those attending once a week. Even for white evangelicals attending church infrequently, over two-thirds still approved of Trump. In comparing the attitudes of white evangelicals with those of other groups regarding such movements and issues as Black Lives Matter and the Affordable Care Act, only the evangelicals showed a level of opposition similar to that they displayed in 2016.

(*Religion in Public*, <https://religioninpublic.blog/2019/01/28/did-evangelicals-become-more-moderate-in-2018/>)

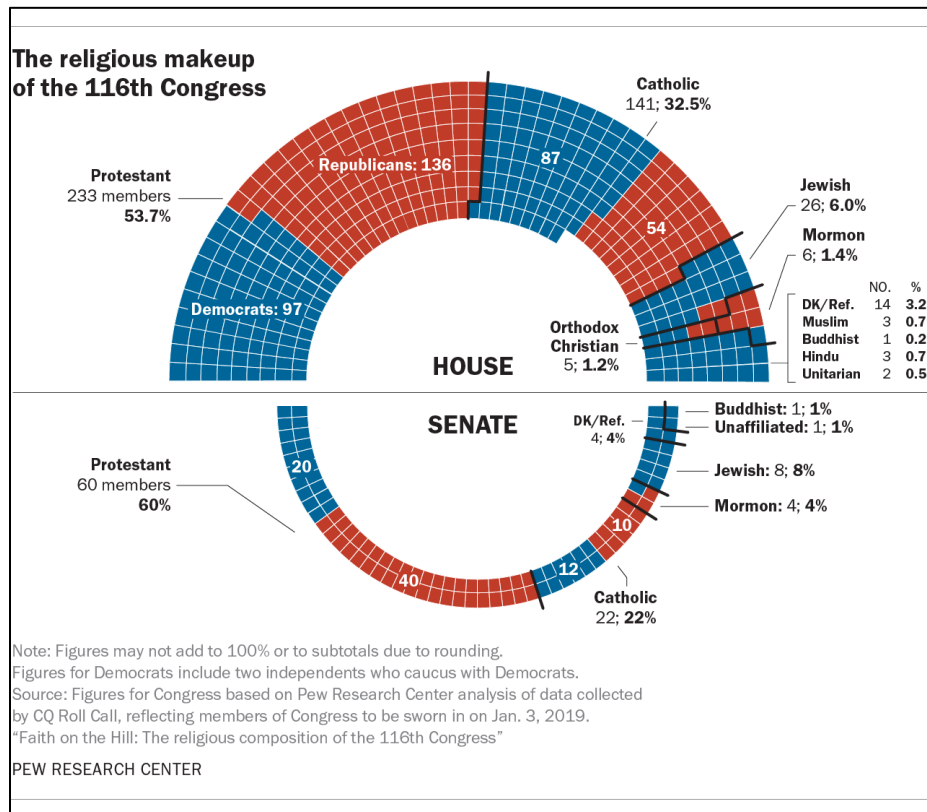


● **The new Congress is the most religiously diverse in American history, though a new survey from Pew Research finds that the incoming class of legislators is still more Christian than the American population as a whole.** The Pew report finds that while the number of self-identified Christians in Congress has dropped, Christians as a whole—and especially Protestants and Catholics—are still overrepresented in proportion to their share in the general population. “Indeed, the religious makeup of the new, 116th Congress is very different from that of the United

States population.” The number of Christians in Congress declined slightly compared with the 115th session, dropping from 90.7 percent to 88.2 percent. By contrast, 71 percent of U.S. adults identify as Christians. (Pew’s survey included Catholics, Protestants, Mormons, Orthodox Christians, Christian Scientists and other faith groups in its Christian category.) Most Christians in Congress are Protestant, including 72 Baptists, 42 Methodists and 26 members each for Presbyterians, Lutherans and Anglicans/Episcopalians. Catholics make up 30.5 percent of the members of Congress with 141 members, and Mormons claim 1.9 percent with 10 members. Five members of Congress are Orthodox Christian.

Meanwhile, the influx of non-Christian members into Congress is almost entirely among Democrats or independents who caucus with Democrats. According to Pew, 61 of the 282 Democrats or independents are non-Christian: In addition to 32 Jewish members, all Muslims (three), Hindus (three), Buddhists (two) and Unitarian Universalists (two) in Congress caucus with Democrats. Only one Democrat—Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona—identifies as religiously unaffiliated, with 18 more declining to specify their religion. By contrast, only two of the 252 Republican members in the 116th Congress—Reps. Lee Zeldin of New York and David Kustoff of Tennessee—identify as something other than Christian (both are Jewish).

(The Pew study on Congress can be downloaded at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2019/01/03/faith-on-the-hill-116/>)



● **A new study by sociologist Fr. Paul Sullins finds that the increasing sexual abuse of youth by Catholic priests in the U.S. is correlated with the growing number of homosexuals in the priesthood, according to a report in the magazine *Inside the Vatican* (December).** Because the majority of youth in abuse cases have been boys, the connection between homosexuality and the abuse has been debated since the crisis first came to light in the early 2000s. A study by John Jay College concluded that widespread American abuse was not related to the number of homosexual priests because the reported increase of homosexual men in seminaries during the 1980s did not correspond to the number of boys who were abused. Sullins criticizes the John Jay study because it relied on “subjective clinical estimates and second-hand narrative reports of apparent homosexual activity in seminaries.” He estimated the share of homosexual priests in the U.S. from a survey conducted by the *Los Angeles Times* in 2002 and compared this against contemporary allegations of abuse, finding that “increase or decrease in the percentage of victims who were male correlated perfectly (.98) with the increase or decrease of homosexual men in the priesthood.” About half of this association was accounted for by the “rise of subcultures or cliques of sexually active priests and faculty in Catholic seminaries.” For each additional concentration of homosexual priests of two times the population proportion of homosexual men (1.8 percent in the U.S. population), incidents of clergy sexual abuse doubled, up to a maximum of 24 incidents per year at a proportion of homosexual priests (14.4 percent) over eight times that of homosexual men in the U.S. population.

(*Inside the Vatican*, <https://insidethevatican.com>)



● While it may be that nations with high levels of existential insecurity and inequality tend to be more religious, the levels of insecurity experienced among individuals within nations appear to have little effect on their religious beliefs and practices, according to a new study by Franz Hollinger and Johanna Muckenhuber in the journal *International Sociology* (Vol. 34, No. 1). The thesis that existential insecurity caused by factors such as natural disaster, poverty, and lack of healthcare and insurance drives up religiosity was developed by Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris and has become a leading explanation of why Third World and developing nations are more religious than wealthier Northern and Western countries. Hollinger and Muckenhuber revisit the data from the World Values Survey (2010–2014) and confirm the findings of previous studies that less developed and egalitarian nations rate higher on measures of religiousness than Western countries. But their “striking new finding” is that within these countries “individual experiences of life risks, such as material deprivation and risk of becoming a victim of crime, have no or only a marginal effect on a person’s level of religiousness.” The researchers offer explanations for this apparent discrepancy between macro-level and micro-level effects that include the possibility that existential insecurity is so common in developing countries that only traumatic events have an impact on religiousness. It may also be that individual religiousness is shaped more by the culture and social milieu one lives in rather than by life experiences. “In the majority of cases, people suffering from difficult life conditions are not more religious than other persons living in the same society.”

(*International Sociology*, <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/iss>)



Culture war or political competition in the Netherlands?

A U.S.-style “culture war” seems unlikely in strongly secularized Dutch society, yet, with the help of American evangelical influence in the Netherlands’ small Bible Belt, this seems to be occurring, reports *The Economist* (January 9). In early January, 250 clerics, mainly from small conservative congregations, signed on to the Dutch version of the American-based Nashville Statement, which sharply critiques progressive ideas about sex and gender, drawing a fierce outcry from the rest of Dutch society. One signatory was Kees van der Staaij, leader of the SGP party, a conservative group with roots in the Dutch Bible Belt, which consists of a string of towns in the center of the country “where Sundays are silent, women defer to husbands, and pastors set rules in family life and politics.” Dutch society, including gay and lesbian celebrities, swiftly condemned the statement, and the government, which groups two liberal parties with two Christian ones, “reaffirmed its gay-friendly bona fides: the minister of education and culture, a member of the liberal D66 party, called the Nashville Statement ‘a step backwards in time,’ and the justice ministry said it might constitute hate speech.” Among mainline churches, the president of Amsterdam’s Vrije Universiteit (VU), a historic Reformed institution that counted a few faculty members among the declaration’s signers, denounced it while many congregations hoisted gay-pride flags.

The article goes on to describe how “the affair is perplexing. For the SGP, the Nashville Statement contained little new. The party takes a hard line on reproduction, sexuality and marriage, but in recent years it has voiced its views quietly, recognizing that with three out of 150 parliamentary seats, it will hardly prevail.” Even if some conflicts remain between these conservative churches, the SGP and the Bible Belt are mostly viewed now as “harmless historical curiosities.” The answer may lie in the recent growth of right-wing populist parties, such as the Freedom Party and the new Forum for Democracy, which use anti-Muslim rhetoric while pressing for gay rights. These parties enjoy broader support than the SGP, and the use of the Nashville Statement and reiterating opposition to same-sex marriage may be one way to differentiate this group from the new populist rivals that threaten its base. But confessional ferment among Dutch Protestants should not be discounted. Most of the pastors who signed the statement came from Reformed congregations that refused to join the consolidation of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands (PKN) in 2004, which included more liberal Lutheran churches. The PKN has since annually lost members while the orthodox Calvinist churches have held steady. The article notes that the drive to translate the Nashville Statement came from Heart Cry, a youth movement that joins Calvinism with “an American-style emphasis on being born again.”



Steiner schools celebrate hundredth anniversary with emphasis on internationalization

While the schools and educational movement inspired by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) first spread in German-speaking countries and then in other areas of the Western world, they are now present in other cultural surroundings as well. But the success of Steiner’s educational principles at the 100th anniversary of the first school’s founding may also lead to a dilution of the specific Anthroposophical legacy he pioneered, writes Kai Funkschmidt in the *EZW Newsletter* (January). For a century, Anthroposophy, which considers itself an esoteric “spiritual science,” has met with significant success in developing initiatives that would have a wider impact on society, far beyond the ranks of the Anthroposophical Society and related organizations. One could mention biodynamic farming and Demeter products, Anthroposophic medicine and Weleda products, trends in arts or architecture, as well as the significant role played by Steiner’s impulse in alternative educational fields with the network of Steiner schools (also called Waldorf schools). All are seen as “applied Anthroposophy.”

While the German schools were closed by the Nazi regime, activities resumed after WWII. Today, one percent of all German pupils are enrolled in a Steiner school, with 90,000 children and teenagers enrolled in 245 schools. The global spread of the schools has been striking in recent decades. The first school in America opened as early as 1928 in New York City, but it was only in the second half of the 20th century that the global spread of Steiner’s educational system increased markedly, and even more so in recent decades, with 1,100 schools and 2,000 kindergartens currently established in some 80 countries, according to the movement’s own statistics. Each

school is formally independent and the result of a local initiative, with associations playing a coordinating role. However, all schools remain based on the worldview and specific educational instructions provided by Rudolf Steiner. However, Funkschmidt observes that the noticeable presence of the Anthroposophical approach varies from one school to another. From time to time, some Anthroposophical periodicals have been asking for a stronger emphasis on Steiner's legacy and the Anthroposophical ethos in the schools.

(*EZW-Newsletter* is a free newsletter in German sent once a month: <https://www.ezw-berlin.de/html/103.php>; a website has been launched for celebrating the Steiner school anniversary and includes a two-part documentary movie on the schools around the world: <https://www.waldorf-100.org/en/>)



Russia expands Middle East mission to encourage Islamic moderation

Russia has actively been promoting a politically pacifist form of Islam, which is coinciding with a push by certain Arab countries to encourage Islamic moderation, writes Hassan Hassan in *The Atlantic* (January 5). Russia's growing presence in the Middle East is usually viewed in strictly military and economic terms, but the country's recent Islamic outreach has become increasingly evident in warming ties between Russia and Saudi Arabia. Much of the Russian opposition to Islamic extremism is an extension of the war in the Chechen Republic against Islamic separatists.

The Russian emissary in the effort to fight Islamic extremism in the Middle East is Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of the Chechen Republic, who is a follower of Sufi Islam. Kadyrov has been warmly welcomed in Saudi Arabia and has developed close friendships with many Arab leaders, Hassan writes. One sign of such close ties between Moscow and Saudi Arabia has been the latter country's decision, under Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz, to cease funding mosques and proselytism in Russia.

Among the factors behind the new Russian outreach in the Middle East is its fear of religious terrorism and nationalist insurrections among Muslims, who make up 15 percent of the Russian population. Hassan adds that Russia may be attempting to counter the perception that it is hostile to Islam and to its Sunni branch in particular, as well as trying to distinguish itself from the U.S., which is also perceived to be anti-Muslim. The Chechen involvement in Syria, including the rebuilding of the Grand Mosque in Aleppo, can be seen as part of an effort to dispel the view that Russia is anti-Sunni and pro-Shiite. Hassan notes that the "scale of the push against political and Salafi Islam is unprecedented in the Arab world. Several countries in the Middle East and North Africa are working together more closely than ever to suppress extremism and steer local populations to a new understanding of street protests as a tool of jihadists and an obstacle to social peace." He concludes that the "U.S. and other Western countries may not accept the principle that Islamists and Salafis are as dangerous as militant jihadis. Russia, by promoting a particular brand of Islamic moderation in unison with Arab powers, could cement its position in the region more deeply than through economic and military means alone."



China's crackdown seeking sinicization of churches

In what is reported to be the worst crackdown on religion since the country's Cultural Revolution when Mao Zedong's government vowed to eradicate religion, researchers say that the current drive in China is less about destroying Christianity than "bringing it to heel," reports *The Guardian* newspaper (January 13). Fueled by government unease over the growing number of Christians and their potential links to the West, "[t]he government has orchestrated a campaign to 'sinicise' Christianity, to turn Christianity into a fully domesticated religion that would do the bidding of the party," said Lian Xi, a professor at Duke University. Since 2018, the government has implemented sweeping rules on religious practices, "[b]ut the campaign is not just about managing behaviour. One of the goals of a government work plan for 'promoting Chinese Christianity' between 2018 and 2022 is 'thought reform.' The plan calls for 'retranslating and annotating' the Bible, to find commonalities with socialism and establish a 'correct understanding' of the text," reports Lily Kuo.

"Over the past year, local governments have shut hundreds of unofficial congregations or 'house churches' that operate outside the government-approved church network..." The article reports that 500 house church leaders signed a statement in November saying that authorities had "removed crosses from buildings, forced churches to hang the Chinese flag and sing patriotic songs, and barred minors from attending." Observers expect the situation will get worse as the campaign reaches more of the country. Kuo reports that local governments have also shut down the state-approved "sanzi" churches. "The goal of the crackdown is not to eradicate religions," said Ying Fuk Tsang, director of the Christian Study Center on Chinese Religion and Culture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. "President Xi Jinping is trying to establish a new order on religion, suppressing its blistering development. [The government] aims to regulate the 'religious market' as a whole." The government has grown especially wary of religions with overseas links, such as Christianity and Islam. In Xinjiang, a surveillance and internment system has been built for Muslim minorities, notably the Uighurs. Christian groups recently cracked down on, such as Early Rain, belong to what some see as a new generation of Christians that has emerged alongside a growing civil rights movement. "Increasingly, activist church leaders have taken inspiration from the democratising role the church played in eastern European countries in the Soviet bloc or South Korea under martial law, according to Lian. Several of China's most active human rights lawyers are Christians," Kuo writes. "They have come to see the political potential of Christianity as a force for change," said Lian. "What really makes the government nervous is Christianity's claim to universal rights and values."

(*The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com>)



Findings & Footnotes

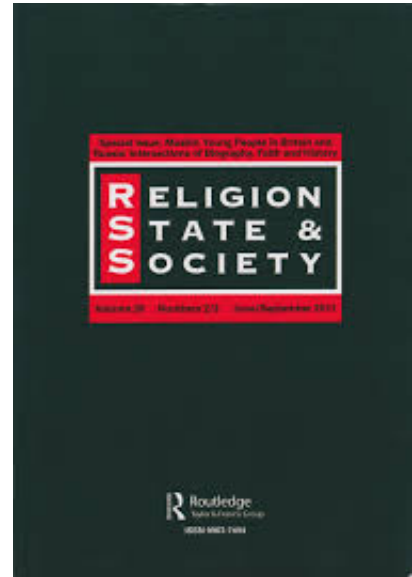
■ The rise of Hindu nationalism and the way it has morphed, particularly during the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, into what is called “Neo-Hindutva,” a diffuse movement comprising various leaders and strategies, is the subject of a special issue of the journal *Contemporary South Asia* (Volume 26, No. 4). The contributors view Neo-Hindutva as seeking a Hindu revival in Indian society and politics, but these efforts have now made inroads into education, development, industry, culture and every other area of public life. Similarly, the organizational reach of Neo-Hindutva goes far beyond such prominent groups as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to encompass the popular guru and business entrepreneur Baba Ramdev and activism in the Indian “hinterlands” of the Northeast, the tribal areas of Nagaland, and the far-flung Indian diasporas that exist around the world.



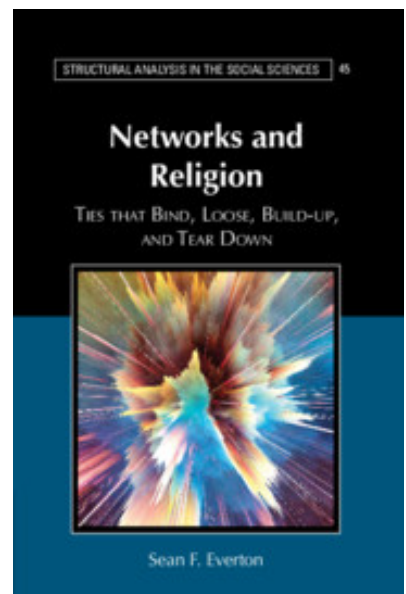
An interview with veteran Hindutva specialist Christophe Jaffrelot suggests that while there is a “saffronization of the public square” and state-sponsored pressure against religious minorities—especially Muslims but increasingly Christians—under Prime Minister Modi, including “unofficial” support of cow protection vigilantism, Hindutva has become too adaptive and diverse to even fit the usual nationalist

narrative. This is especially borne out in the articles on yoga and holistic health, as promoted by the consumer brand Patanjali, and social media, where Neo-Hindutva has gained a hearing among the middle class, taking on more cosmopolitan and less dogmatic forms. For more information on this issue, visit: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ccsa20/current>.

■ The current issue of the journal *Religion, State and Society* (Vol. 47, No. 1) presents in-depth analyses of round three of the Religion and State project dataset (1990–2014). The project is a cross-national study (183 countries) covering data relating to issues of religious freedom and conflict and competition between religious and secular political actors. Political scientist Jonathan Fox opens the issue with a survey of how state religion policies are becoming more common throughout the world, with only a small minority of countries making no changes in these policies between 1990 and 2014. The issue covers a wide swath of topics, including the relationship between terrorism and government interference in religious institutions (making religious freedom the best preventative measure against religious violence), the role of religion-based parties in religious mobilization, and the role of church-state relations in the growth of populist parties. On the latter topic, Andrea Molle looks at the development of the nationalist-populist National League and the rise to power of its leader Matteo Salvini (now Minister of the Interior and Deputy Prime Minister of Italy), and finds that while church-state relations may not explain the rise of such parties, religiosity, including such indicators as having a religious rather than a secular wedding, was a strong predictor of support for the National League. For more information on this issue, visit: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/crss20/current>.



■ Sean Everton's pioneering new book *Networks and Religion* (Cambridge University Press, \$34.99) is both a primer for studying how networks influence religion and a collection of studies showing how this method yields significant insights about changes in contemporary religion that should have a wider readership beyond the scholarly community. Although the study of social networks has become an important part of social science research, it has only recently found a hearing in the social scientific study of religion, with social network analysts paying scant attention to religion (in fact, often viewing religion as a foil against the dynamism of network formation). The book's empirical section starts with an engaging examination of the role of network ties in conversion, citing case studies of everything from how C.S. Lewis's colleagues at Oxford (including J.R.R. Tolkien) were instrumental in his turn from atheism, to the growth of Mormonism worldwide and house churches in China. The importance of such connections in solidifying religious commitment and involvement, as seen in



megachurches' use of small groups and new religious movements' (NRM) encouragement of familial ties (as opposed to the stereotype of NRM members being isolated from family), suggest that dense rather than sparse ties (encouraged by patterns of high mobility) are more beneficial to religious organizations. In fact, ties that are too dense might encourage religious radicalism.

Throughout the book, Everton uses social network theory and methods to reexamine prominent research findings. For instance, he finds that—echoing the work of Robert Putnam—social networks are central in connecting congregation members to opportunities to engage in civic life through volunteering, and that the spread of acceptance of women's ordination within segments of Protestantism was because such an innovation was diffused through network ties between similar denominations. Everton, who teaches at the Naval Postgraduate School and has done previous work on terrorism, returns to extremist groups toward the end of the book and finds that network ties are particularly important in predicting which ones may engage in violent behavior. It is those groups that, along with holding apocalyptic beliefs, limit their ties to fellow members and draw recruits through those strong ties that are most likely to become radicalized. Everton counsels authorities to maintain ties and contact with groups that are in danger of radicalizing. He actually concludes that minimizing media scrutiny and public ridicule of such groups while encouraging religious freedom have been shown to prevent isolation and perceptions of persecution which drive radicalization.

On/File: A Continuing Record of Groups, Movements, People, and Events Impacting Religion

1) The **Church Militant** has become one of the largest and most influential conservative Catholic media organizations through its use of Internet technology and its frequent attacks on the church hierarchy during a period when the pope, bishops, and other church leaders are in the spotlight for their role in the sex abuse crisis in Catholicism. Said to have a base of three million supporters, the Church Militant runs daily newscasts and other commentaries seeking to defend Catholic orthodoxy over the Internet for a \$10 monthly fee. Founder Michael Voris, a former television news reporter, transformed the company from a producer of catechetical videos into a polemical tool that has particularly targeted Pope Francis as being a weak leader encouraging heterodoxy and uncertainty among Catholics. The network has been sidelined in Catholic dioceses, including its own in Detroit, which demanded that it drop the Catholic label from its original name, Real Catholic TV. Much of the focus of the Church Militant is on criticizing church leaders who support greater inclusion of gays in the church, most recently arguing that much of the sex abuse crisis is mainly a phenomenon of homosexual priests allowed to harass teenagers and young men. (**Source:** *National Catholic Reporter*, December 28–January 10)



2) It has been described by its organizers as “the largest international gathering of Orthodox scholars in modern history”—with some 300 scholars from 40 countries, not all of them theologians, presenting at 75 panels in what some described as a “Who’s Who” of global Orthodoxy. The event is planned to be repeated every four years at different locations around the world. Supported by the Orthodox Archdiocese of Iași as well as by several American and European Orthodox institutions and associations, the first conference of **the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA)** convened in Iași, Romania, on January 9–12. IOTA is a U.S. non-profit association, which also makes clear the input from the Orthodox “diaspora” in such an initiative. It is striking that it occurs at the very time the Orthodox churches are going through serious tensions and potential lasting divisions over the issue of Ukraine.

But the organization of the conference started months before Constantinople decided to grant autocephaly to Ukraine. Moreover, it was the result of longer trends, such as the emergence of new generations of Orthodox scholars and attempts to promote Orthodox unity, despite the current developments threatening it. It was also a direct outcome of the Pan-Orthodox synod (minus Russia and three other churches) held in Crete in 2016, where the idea first emerged. IOTA intends to be a place for intellectual exchange and to cultivate constructive relations with all Orthodox churches, without supporting one or another. One should note that the initiative came from academics, not from the hierarchs of Orthodox churches. At the same time, the event was supported by the Church of Romania, whose international role among Orthodox churches might increase in the context of the current tensions between Constantinople and Moscow, depending on how cleverly it can navigate inter-Orthodox relations. (**Source:** IOTA website: <https://iota-web.org>. The website provides access to video recordings of some of the conference sessions, including the keynote

speech by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware in which he attempted to make a balanced and critical assessment of the current situation of Orthodox churches, especially in relation to the 2016 gathering in Crete and the crisis over Ukraine.)

